A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY

EXPLORATIONS

RAY McSAVANEY

WITH A FOREWORD BY JOHN NICHOLS

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$75.00 in Canada

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BY

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Ray McSavaney is known for his sensitively seen and exquisitely crafted black-and-white images of natural and urban landscapes. *Explorations: A Photographic Journey* contains images taken by the photographer over the past twenty years and is representative of most of his photographic projects. He is attracted to subjects that have an intrinsic beauty, even if their underlying associations or their actual uses are not immediately appealing. His subjects range from the unspoiled landscape to urban areas that have been used, neglected, and are being forgotten by most people.

Seven essays written by Ray McSavaney describe his photographic methods, his personal philosophy, and his stance toward the subjects he chooses to photograph. A foreword by the noted writer and photographer John Nichols gives the reader a remarkable insight into the photographer's methodology and concerns.

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64 Large and 22 Small
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Front Jacket Photograph
Walking Trees, El Capitan Meadow, Yosemite Valley, 1983

Back Jacket Photograph
Santa Ana Freeway Bridge, Los Angeles, California, 1989

EXPLORATIONS

FOR THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

I HAVE EXPLORED THE QUALITIES

OF LIGHT, SPACE AND SUBJECT, WITH

THE HOPE THAT KNOWLEDGE WOULD

EVOLVE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT WE

OCCUPY AND HOW WE RELATE TO

THAT ENVIRONMENT

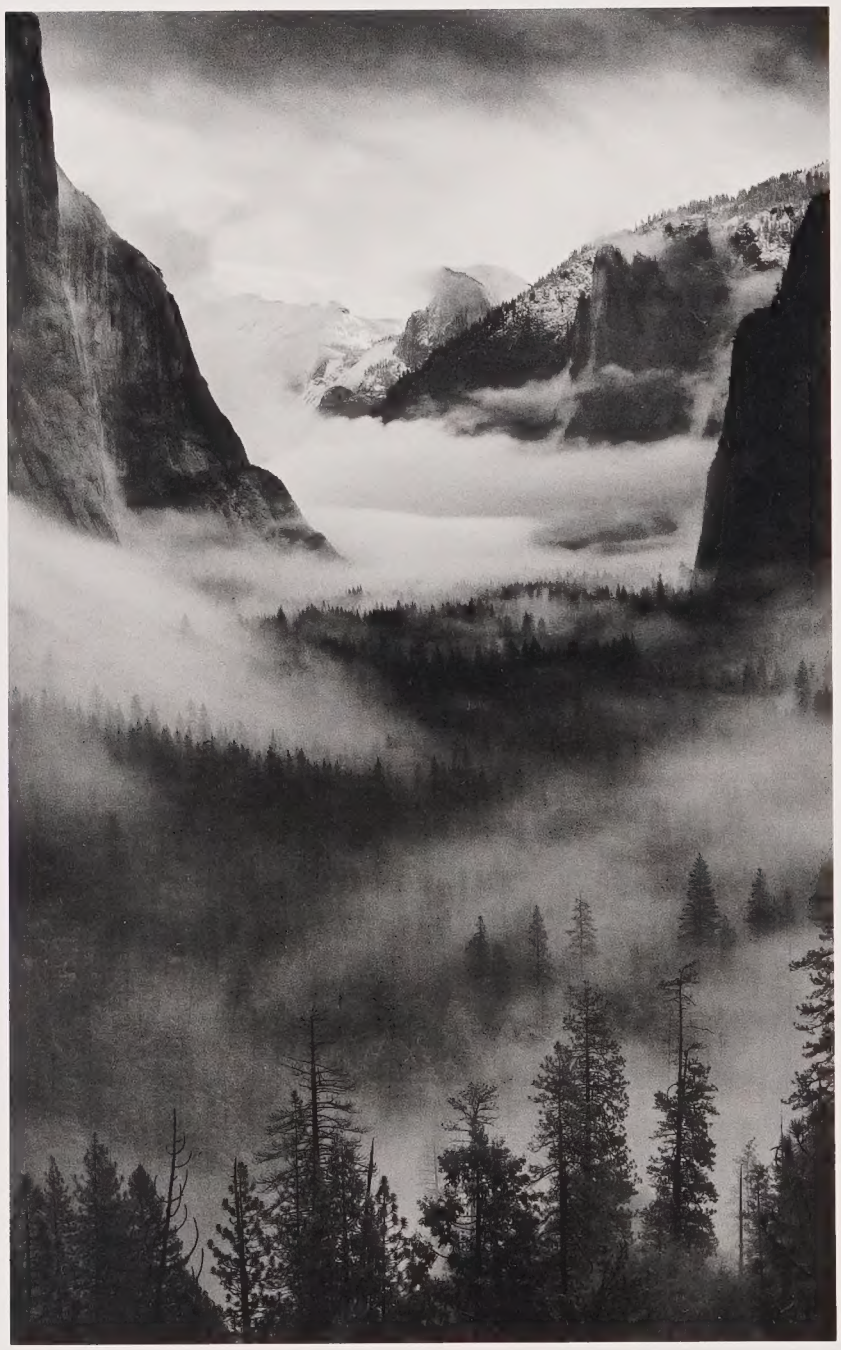

PLATE 1 VIEW OF YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1978

EXPLORATIONS

FINDLAY & SAMPSON EDITIONS

LOS ANGELES

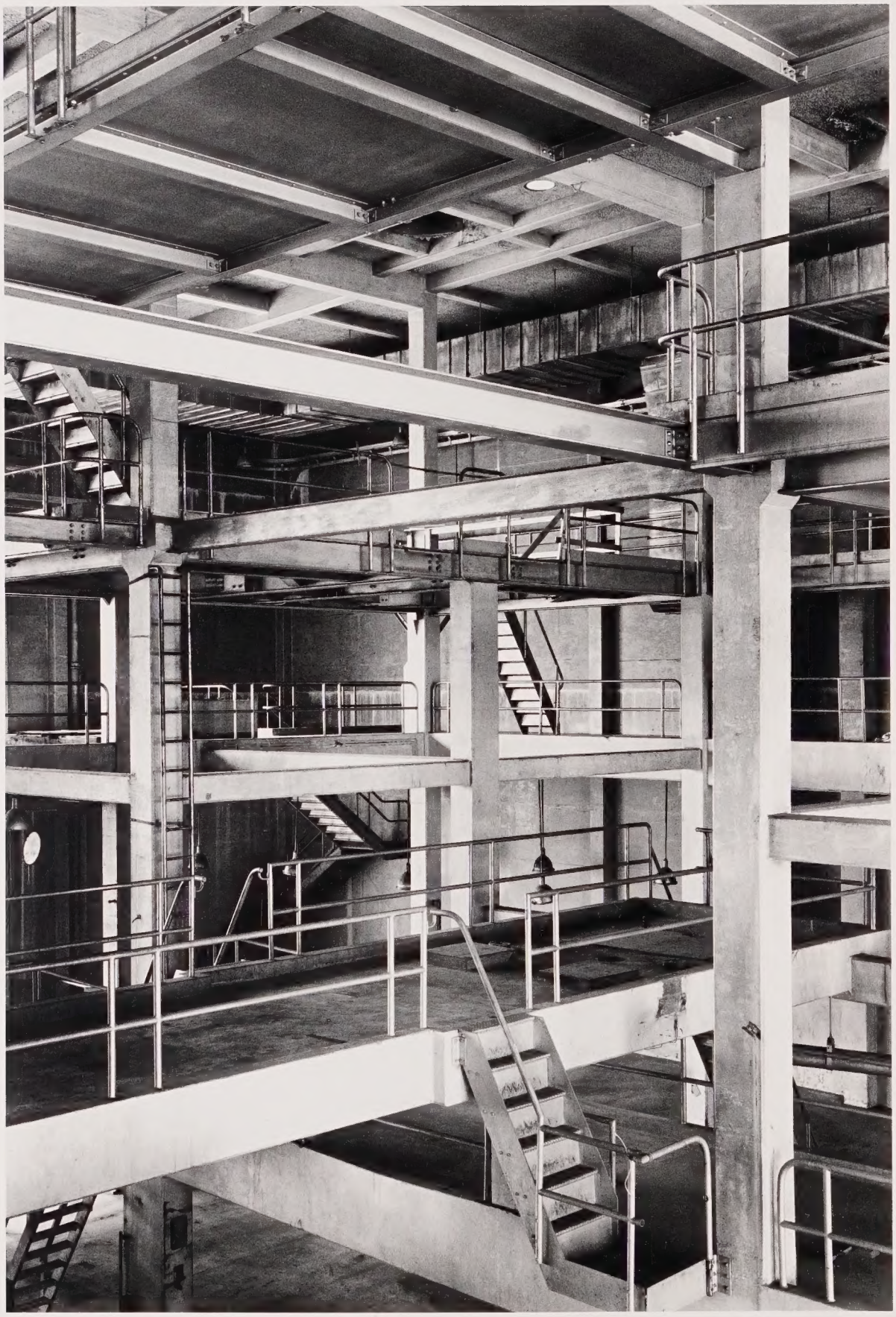

PLATE 2 INDUSTRIAL INTERIOR, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

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For

the memory of my parents,

Roy and Dorothy McSavaney,

with gratitude for their

connection to the past

and their gift

of the future

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FOREWORD

Still, the Whole Process is So Unobtrusive

On the surface, Ray McSavaney seems like a truly ordinary guy. He is a gentle and taciturn man. Nobody will ever accuse him of being bombastic, or quick on the trigger, or the life of the party. He is intrinsically human, he suffers from allergies, and he even appears to be half-blind much of the time. In fact, watching him tilt down his glasses and squint to inspect a print that's only two inches from his nose doesn't inspire much confidence that Ray can actually *see* anything at all, let alone interpret shapes, light, or shadows in the special manner that makes bold so much of his work.

Yet it doesn't take long to discover that Ray is a remarkable artist. He has an eye that can focus with uncanny clarity, and he is surely one of the most consummate perfectionists that I have ever met. And his work stands at the forefront of photography in America today.

It isn't real exciting to watch Ray in action, however. He simply does not call attention to himself. He teaches numerous photography workshops, but his method is totally laid-back, compassionate, easy. He makes observations, a few quiet suggestions, but rarely imposes judgments. More often than not, he answers questions with other questions that enable students to arrive at pertinent conclusions of their own.

One quality above all others I admire in Ray: he does not fluster easily. In the many hours we have spent together, I have only observed him making a few images. But the experience has helped in part to calm down my own peripatetic way of forging art. The trick I have learned, especially in photography, is to seek balance, always tracking the calm within any storm.

In the field, Ray never runs around like a chicken with its head cut off when he's chasing the opportune angle, the proper light. Rather, he moves deliberately and with great care. He seems at ease and also intent on respecting the environment he's in. You have the impression that a conscience is at work. Occasionally, Ray lifts up a viewing frame and peers through it. Eventually, he drops this frame on *the* spot and goes back to fetch his equipment. He takes his time. He doesn't panic if the light changes. He waits. He *thinks*. Apparently, he is endowed with near infinite patience.

The impression I have is that Ray is absolutely sure of himself at the level where professionalism merges with the mystery of visual, intellectual, and emotional intuition.

And if things should happen to go wrong?—*tant pis*. To my knowledge, Ray has never lost his temper. After all, there's always another day. And Ray's equanimity strikes me as being a key to survival over the long haul.

Still, the whole process is so unobtrusive, you hardly notice Ray is making a picture. He is the antithesis of a pushy photographer. When I look at the end result, though, I realize he brings as much insight and passion to his work as any person I have known in any aesthetic pursuit.

For several years I have been an instructor in a workshop that Ray conducts in northern New Mexico. My favorite moment in each workshop is when he gives us a demonstration of building a print. Step-by-step, Ray reveals how he takes an underexposed negative and, in the darkroom, transforms it into a finished image so rich in mood, texture, and beautiful intensity that it seems an almost surreal accomplishment.

Call it manipulation, call it magic, about the only way I can react to the skill and complexity demonstrated in this arduous and delicate operation is to admit that I'm awed. The man knows *exactly* what he is doing.

Whether the subject is a "walking tree," a building in downtown Los Angeles, or a white rock in a bucolic river, all the images in this book are intriguing. Perhaps one print required Grade #3 paper, while another needed exposure through different filters, and a third involved density altering of the negative. Maybe it took days of dodging and burning and trial and error to finally reveal the core of what originally inspired the photographer's introspection. All that calm and technical expertise becomes moot, however, when you see the finished image. For each altered state, in one way or another, is a world that captures the imagination, or stirs the heart, or almost makes you flinch in the face of its ethereal simplicity.

Some of these images are quite "safe" because we can identify with their classical harmonies: a majestic Yosemite landscape; corn lilies etched in silver; the pristine details of an aspen forest. Yet other pictures are often disquieting, almost willfully provocative: the too-surreal serenity of dying Mono Lake; a shovel in a poultry plant; a chillingly fantastic abandoned tire factory.

It is not unusual for Ray to challenge the observer by applying a whole new set of aesthetic or emotional values to what is commonly considered ugly, mundane, or even irrelevant. He makes us think about what we discard, destroy, or ignore as much as he allows us to rejoice in the positive allures of the magnificent natural world.

In the end, his prints—be they tranquil, disturbing, or exquisitely and radiantly peaceful—always present a vision transformed by an insight that is original, and the images are exhilarating because the vision is so *clear*.

This is not an easy or a pat collection of photographs. I think the book is a thoughtful and thought-provoking essay. I also feel that all the images are very beautiful, even the few that I happen to dislike because they seem harsh, or cold, or perhaps even vaguely cruel.

The journey of exploration that Ray takes in this book is one that any person can share whose curiosity is honed, whose imagination stays active, and whose conscience is concerned with the values of life on earth. Above all, these photographs demonstrate a love and a respect for all environments, not just for that territory which is glamorous, clichéd, or easily accessible.

For me, Ray's work is about the necessity of seeing and appreciating the whole of life in order to love or question any small infinity that may lurk in a grain of sand. And that is a macroscopic vision for which I am truly grateful.

John Nichols *Taos, New Mexico 1992*

INTRODUCTION

The Viewer is Invited to Share the Explorations

My first vaguely remembered encounters with the visual arts consist of fragmentary images from *Great Expectations* and numerous other movies of the early to mid-1940s. A little later, there were walks down a palm-lined street past the rows of single family houses and duplexes to watch the glow of a small, greenish three-to-four inch picture on an early television screen in the window of a neighborhood appliance store. The still photographic images that I most strongly recall, however, appeared on postcards and small posters picturing the landscape; these were handed out at gas stations as enticements to buy a certain brand of gas and often showed scenic spots along vacation routes. Gathering these cards and posters constituted my first attempt at collecting images, a pursuit that has continued in various forms throughout my life.

On trips with my parents to see relatives, there was little time available to visit the areas depicted in such tourist materials, and the postcards themselves became for me a way of experiencing the terrain that we traveled through. Later on, they became models for the way I conceptualized my first landscape photographs. That conception was further refined by encountering Swiss calendars and a brief introduction to camera-club competitions and travel books. Although I had acquired a college background in architecture, design, and art—including one class in basic photography—my early photographic images were scarcely influenced by the visual principles of these disciplines. The aesthetic principles in a photography class taught by Robert Heinecken at UCLA in 1962 had little relationship to my interests at that time. (Although, the questions posed by Heinecken, concerning the photographic process, would ultimately become important to me in the 1970s.)

Most of my photography consisted of recording the occasional trip or family gathering until the late 1960s. At that time I began to photograph more extensively while backpacking, but there was no real shift in the quality of my work. In the early 1970s a slow change began to appear, and in 1972 I attended an Ansel Adams workshop, which, along with several subsequent workshops, helped to accelerate my progress. During the next several years, photography increasingly began to compete with the demands of my job in urban planning, and in 1979 I left the planning field for photography.

My first photographic work concentrated on the landscape, shifted to sporadically include architectural subjects, became predominantly urban in orientation at the time when I was leaving the field of urban planning, later concentrated on people, and presently includes all of these subjects. For me, the world is difficult to understand through isolated bits of information, and these only become clear when viewed in context. This is perhaps better expressed in terms of my background in urban planning: just as a successful building cannot exist without a network of supporting functions and consideration of adjacent land uses, an object to be photographed cannot be comprehended without considering the surrounding objects and adjacent spaces.

When photographing, I consider how objects relate to each other aesthetically and emotionally, rather than constructing compositions. The relationship of the various images to each other; the ideas intended when the negative was made; the execution,

change, or modification of these concepts in the making of the print; and the interaction between the photographic image and the viewer: these are the important elements of photography.

In beginning to assemble this book I considered many possible systems of organization, among them separating photographs into different groups according to subject matter. This method, however, left out many images that refused to fit neatly in any category but were still important to me. While they sometimes represented projects that had never fully materialized or seemed to be of only momentary interest, they often formed the connective links between other diverse subjects. Landscape has been an interest of mine since my first color slides were exposed, and I expect that interest to continue as long as I photograph. I have concentrated on other subjects for periods ranging in length from two to twelve years, and each of these endeavors has resulted in hundreds of negatives. Often, in retrospect, I find that many aesthetic and technical concerns overlap within the divergent projects carried out at a particular time. Many areas or subjects are revisited as new insights allow me to explore old and new conditions. Perhaps the only subject not included in the book, and on which I have spent considerable time, is people. These images tended to conflict with those that have been included and dealt with issues that needed much more space than was available in this book.

The sequence in which the images in the book were taken seemed an important factor to me, and gradually they began to fall into an approximate chronological order. However, an exact chronological order seemed too inflexible and didn't allow for relationships that had occurred as ideas were being explored. Therefore, some liberty has been taken with strict chronology, and images of the same subject taken over a long period of time have been placed together. Selection and sequencing is often used to pose questions. Connections and relationships may be too obvious for some people, while they may seem obscure, go unnoticed or even be interpreted in an entirely unique manner by others. This is consistent with the intention that the book act as a catalyst for considering our environment.

The first image in the main body of images was taken on a one-day hike to Lone Pine Lake and shows portions of a raft resting on the shore. It was taken as a straightforward image depicting the raft, reflections, and mountains, a documentation of what I saw. The camera was hand held, necessitating a faster shutter speed and resulting in a somewhat underexposed negative. In the darkroom the interpretation of the negative changed, partially due to the underexposure and also as the result of a more interesting possibility that I saw on the test strip. In selecting images for this book, this image was chosen as the first because of its importance to me and because of a more recently realized meaning. It recalled for me elements of the Luminist movement in nineteenth-century American painting. Artists involved in that movement often used boats resting on the water to denote a journey—sometimes spiritual—toward the horizon, which was usually beautifully clear and enticing. In my image the raft is breaking up and needs repair. Instead of a horizon, there are unsettling reflections of the mountains and the sun. The ambiguous space almost becomes a cave-like setting from which the viewer must seek a safer path for exploration. This book has become a journey through the natural and urban landscapes of the uncertain present. The viewer is invited to share the explorations of areas we occupy and often see as separate and unrelated.

Ray McSavaney *Los Angeles, California, 1992*

EXPLORATIONS

The Plates & Essays

PLATE 3 JUNE LAKE CALIFORNIA, 1976

PLATE 4 MUSHROOMS, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1973

PLATE 5 WINTER SNOWSTORM, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1973

PLATE 6 FROST-COVERED BRANCH, MERCED RIVER, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1974

PLATE 7 FLOATING ROCK, TORREY PINES STATE PARK, CALIFORNIA, 1975

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I

Light can also Impart Life to a Photographic Image

Initially, my photographic interest in the natural environment was directed toward obtaining an image that resembled the original rock, tree, mountain, lake, or stream seen while on backpacking trips. I did not consider how to approach a subject conceptually or even the interaction between light and form. Without any conscious effort to seek out conditions that would intensify interpretative values, however, some combination of factors would occasionally occur, and a more satisfying image would result. Gradually, I became less pleased with those images that simply depicted surface characteristics and was drawn to images that revealed more about the subject's qualities. I began to pursue situations and conditions that I could easily manipulate to achieve different levels of meaning.

As my interest in photography increased, available time for backpacking to more isolated locations diminished. With abundant photographic possibilities within a short walking distance from the road, Yosemite Valley became a frequent destination. I used other photographers' images of Yosemite as models for how my early landscape photographs should look, and I made similar images, using them to evaluate the progress of my work. The grandeur of Yosemite Valley had always impressed me, and there were named formations whose inherent importance could be relied upon to justify my images to other people. During winter months there was an abundance of water in its various forms—rain, snow, ice, mist, and ground fog—and there was a good balance between sun and shade, allowing me to experiment with different lighting conditions. Gradually, my attention was attracted to the interplay between varied weather conditions and the Valley's topography; the changing light often intensified a subject's emotional impact. However, I seldom fully appreciated those moments of splendid light and rarely translated them into successful photographs. When light was not stimulating on a panoramic scale, I turned to details that had not previously attracted my attention.

During May, June, and July, the corn lily grows in moist meadows and along streams at high elevations in the Sierra Nevada Mountain range. I had seen the plant many times on backpacking trips but had never photographed it because conditions always seemed wrong—the light was too harsh, it was too windy, or my own visual awareness was lacking. Prior to an Ansel Adams photography workshop, I was on an afternoon hike with a group of friends headed toward a viewpoint overlooking Yosemite Valley. We had seen a field of corn lilies on the way but, anxious to get to our predetermined destination, had not stopped. For me the viewpoint had been enjoyable but not photographically productive. On our way back, we all slowed down as we approached the field, stopped, and photographed until an oncoming thunderstorm chased us down from our high elevation. That short session with corn lilies was enough to engage my attention during the spring of 1977, again in 1978, and sporadically since that time.

All of the plants in a field of corn lilies may appear to be identical from a distance. Upon coming closer to a promising stand, however, I am usually drawn to a particular grouping of leaves. An exploration of swirls and patterns begins, and I find myself involved in photographing an unlimited array of dancelike forms. During this period, the purpose of many of my trips shifted from the documentation of the physical landscape to the exploration of new ideas and ways of seeing. I became more attuned to the possibilities inherent in different lighting conditions and how light could be used to define and enhance ideas.

Just as light gives life to a plant through the physical process of photosynthesis, light can also impart life to a photographic image by some magical combination of the photographer's insights and his ability to express ideas by darkroom technique. For some photographers, there is a specific time of day or some other condition that is most conducive to bringing the message of light to the viewer, but for me all light has the potential for beauty. It is difficult for me to wake before sunrise, but I sometimes manage and will then continue to look for images until long after the sun sets. I want to let light convey a sense of openness and tranquility, while occasionally creating questions upon which the viewer may reflect.

Although photographers work with light, few have an understanding of its scientific nature. While photographing, my thoughts are not turned toward scientific theories of light but are more attuned to the aesthetic interaction between light and the subject. The physical and philosophical implications of light become important to me at other times. Most scientists presently believe that at the moment of creation, light and all other forms of matter that exist today were the same. From that moment of creation, the universe expanded, temperatures cooled, and primary matter began diversifying and performing different functions. Ultimately, our world was created from matter originating from the same source as the sun. The gradual evolution of a delicate relationship between sun and earth, including both life-giving and life-threatening potentials, has resulted in a unique environment that is not known to be duplicated within our universe. This relationship developed over billions of years and triggered by a seemingly infinite series of distinct events, sustains us on this fragile planet. What amount of neglect, abuse, small changes or series of major events would it take to alter this sacred environment so that the earth would become like other planets where no familiar form of life can exist?

Illustrations 1, 2 and 3 (left to right) Three Windows, Isleton, California 1979

PLATE 10 CORN LILY EAST SIDE OF SIERRA NEVADA MOUNTAINS, CALIFORNIA, 1977

PLATE 11 CORN LILY, NEAR LUNDY LAKE, CALIFORNIA, 1978

PLATE 14 TWO DOORS, BODIE STATE PARK, CALIFORNIA, 1979

PLATE 11 CORN LILY, NEAR LUNDY LAKE, CALIFORNIA, 1978

PLATE 12 SANDSTONE DETAIL, TORREY PINES STATE PARK, 19[illegible]

PLATE 13 STAINED WALLPAPER DETAIL BODIE STATE PARK, CALIFORNIA, 1977

II

How do We Relate to the Environment We Occupy?

In my early work I maintained a separation between those images that had to be taken at such times as family gatherings and what I considered my "serious" photography. The former contained people; the latter didn't. In the early 1970s most of my photography involved the natural landscape because it was easier to photograph inanimate objects, such as trees, rocks, clouds, mountains, or buildings. They provided a much safer form of communication and didn't threaten my uncertain photographic process. In the mid 1970s, anthropomorphic figures began to appear occasionally in my photography in the form of patterns visible in rocks and other subjects. Then I began visiting the ghost town of Bodie in eastern California. For a time in the 1870s, Bodie was the second largest city in California due to the gold and silver mania. Now, a state park maintains the buildings, furniture and other objects in a status of arrested decay. Although initially concentrating on photographing building facades and interiors, scraps of posters depicting human beings and objects closely associated with people began to attract my attention.

While photographing in Bodie, I was able to sense the difficulties and the history that had given the town the reputation of being "only slightly better than hell." I began to get a clearer perception of events than I had ever gotten through reading about the place. Sometimes, a scrap of stained wallpaper or some artifact would elicit a strong personal response and aid in developing an idea. It is known that the intensity of light and the volume of sound diminish as one moves away from the source. At a greater distance light and sound can still be picked up with very sensitive equipment, but they eventually become too faint and are lost. When I visit certain places that evoke strong feelings, I wonder if some light or sound waves created by past events are still reflecting and reverberating, carrying messages that we can't see or hear but only sense. These messages may not be fully understood but may activate a thought process that will only register at an intuitive level.

In the late 1970s, as I was leaving my career in urban planning, people and their artifacts were becoming important in my photography. Somewhat paradoxically, the issues that had been important in urban planning were also beginning to enter my photgraphy. How do we shape our environment and, conversely, how does it shape us? How do we relate to the environment we occupy? What can structures that are abandoned or left unattended tell us about a culture? What are the connections between the natural and urban environments? How do we move back and forth between these two areas we define and use in different ways? And finally, can these concerns give us answers to questions or even help us to pose the right questions about environmental and societal issues that deserve our attention?

PLATE 15 WALLPAPER DETAIL OF SMALL BOY BODIE STATE PARK CALIFORNIA, 1977

II

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PLATE 16 NEGATIVE PORTRAIT 1979

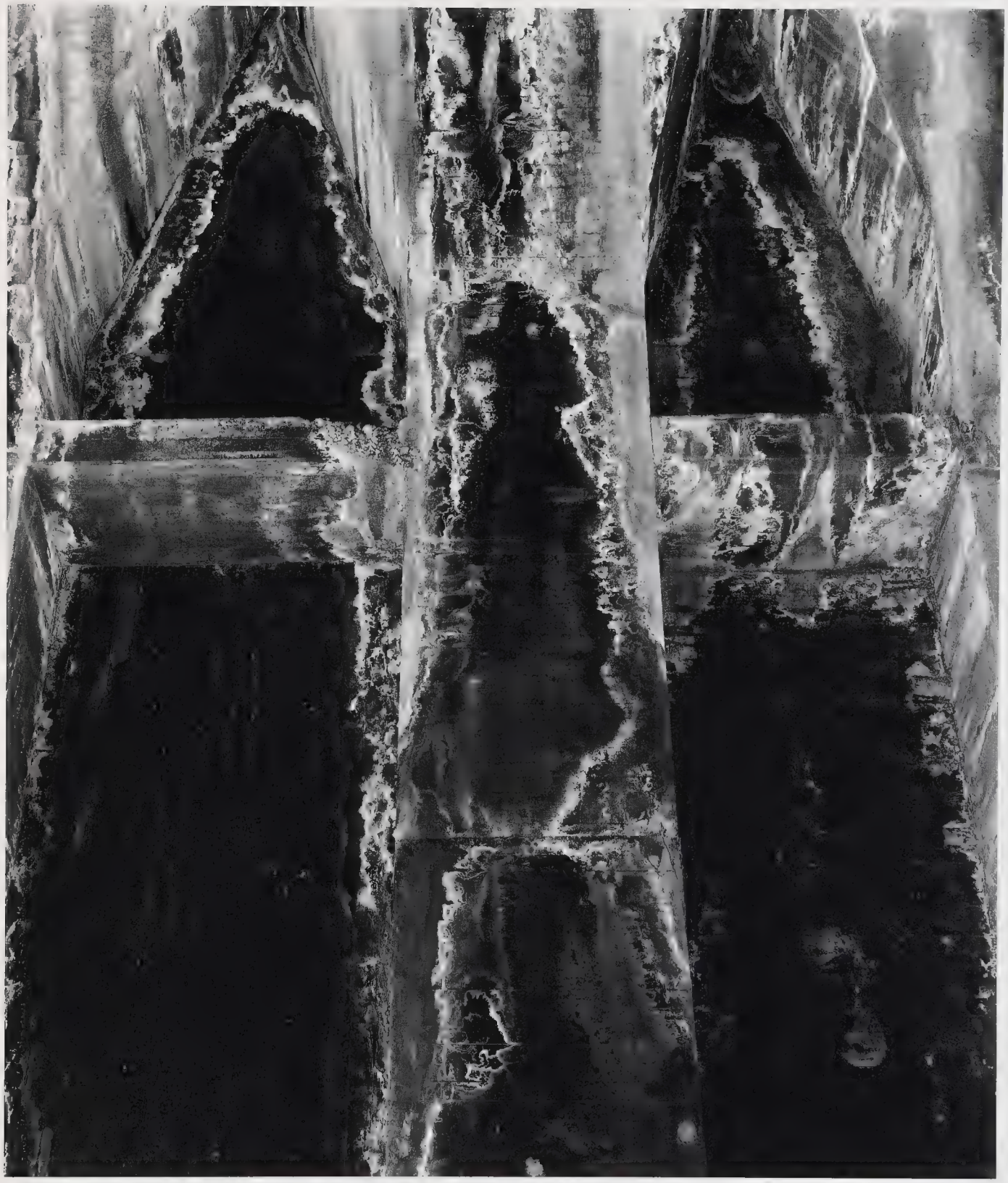

PLATE 17 CEILING OF BROADWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1979

PLATE 18 OLYMPIC BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 19 OLYMPIC BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 20 SANTA ANA FREEWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 1989

PLATE 23 SANTA ANA FREEWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1990

PLATE 20 SANTA ANA FREEWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1989

PLATE 21 SANTA ANA FREEWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1989

PLATE 22 SANTA ANA FREEWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1989

III

My Thought Process While Photographing is not Linear

In 1979 I became interested in photographing the industrial areas of Los Angeles, particularly the bridge sites along the Los Angeles River. As these areas are not generally considered "safe", I usually visit them with a group of photographers. We arrive separately and talk for a while. Sometimes strangers will leave as soon as they notice us, suggesting that something had been going on that shouldn't be witnessed by other people or recorded with cameras. At other times, we see only the homeless striving to protect their privacy and seemingly meager possessions.

After chatting about recent events and looking around, we begin to think about photographic possibilities. Often, homeless people are still sleeping as I walk through the area. I look at the quality of light, the graffiti, and other details that I've seen over the last twelve years, while keeping an eye out for any recent changes that might suggest something to me. Within these small areas, there are still places that I haven't photographed. I leave my camera equipment in one place and walk around with a viewing frame that I somewhat unconsciously turn in my hand, not yet holding it up to my eye. I want to get a sense of the area before I begin to look for a photograph and become involved with equipment. It has been several weeks since I've been at a bridge site, and some of my familiarity with the site has been lost. As I wander through this forgotten urban landscape, I become more aware of a combination of arches, spaces, and graffiti where a photograph can be made. As I move back and forth, then sideways, the relationships begin to form in a more satisfying manner. While going through this physical process, I'm thinking about some of my previous prints. Does this image involve a new insight, a variation on a prior theme, or does it duplicate something previously photographed? A duplication of a previous negative wouldn't surprise me; I am occasionally attracted to the same elements with the result that, although I may start out from a new viewpoint, I return to previous tripod holes in the course of arranging and refining an image.

When a general location is selected I use the viewing frame to determine exactly what will be included in the image and which lens will be used by holding the frame at various distances from my eye. Then I drop the frame where I intend to set up my tripod, allowing me to retain the exact location and relationships that were initially seen. I bring camera equipment over and begin the mechanical process of setting it up; all the while, I'm thinking about the possibility of other images, other sites, and other subjects. Maybe there will be time to go to the 4th Street Bridge later. There were a couple of images that I saw the last time I was there but didn't take because the lighting was too harsh in one area and it didn't feel safe enough to go into another spot that looked promising. On that occasion, it had been late in the afternoon and by that time there had been only one other photographer with me. As I was setting up the camera, a girl chewing a carrot had come by and asked some questions about what I was doing; she was in her late teens or early twenties. She told me that she had taken a photography class in junior high school, and I let her look at the ground glass. She was hungry and asked if I had anything to eat. All I had was a soda, and I gave it to her. She said that she was living under the bridge and that although she never thought she would be living in such conditions, she realized now that no one can tell what lies ahead. The security that she had enjoyed in her childhood was no longer a certainty. After I had finished, I mentioned thinking about photographing in another location;

PLATE 24 SANTA ANA FREEWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1992

III

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In 1979 I became interested in photographing the industrial areas of Los Angeles, particularly the bridge sites along the Los Angeles River. As these areas are not generally considered "safe", I usually visit them with a group of photographers. We arrive separately and talk for a while. Sometimes strangers will leave as soon as they notice us, suggesting that something had been going on that shouldn't be witnessed by other people or recorded with cameras. At other times, we see only the homeless striving to protect their privacy and seemingly meager possessions.

After chatting about recent events and looking around, we begin to think about photographic possibilities. Often, homeless people are still sleeping as I walk through the area. I look at the quality of light, the graffiti, and other details that I've seen over the last twelve years, while keeping an eye out for any recent changes that might suggest something to me. Within these small areas, there are still places that I haven't photographed. I leave my camera equipment in one place and walk around with a viewing frame that I somewhat unconsciously turn in my hand, not yet holding it up to my eye. I want to get a sense of the area before I begin to look for a photograph and become involved with equipment. It has been several weeks since I've been at a bridge site, and some of my familiarity with the site has been lost. As I wander through this forgotten urban landscape, I become more aware of a combination of arches, spaces, and graffiti where a photograph can be made. As I move back and forth, then sideways, the relationships begin to form in a more satisfying manner. While going through this physical process, I'm thinking about some of my previous prints. Does this image involve a new insight, a variation on a prior theme, or does it duplicate something previously photographed? A duplication of a previous negative wouldn't surprise me; I am occasionally attracted to the same elements with the result that, although I may start out from a new viewpoint, I return to previous tripod holes in the course of arranging and refining an image.

When a general location is selected I use the viewing frame to determine exactly what will be included in the image and which lens will be used by holding the frame at various distances from my eye. Then I drop the frame where I intend to set up my tripod, allowing me to retain the exact location and relationships that were initially seen. I bring camera equipment over and begin the mechanical process of setting it up; all the while, I'm thinking about the possibility of other images, other sites, and other subjects. Maybe there will be time to go to the 4th Street Bridge later. There were a couple of images that I saw the last time I was there but didn't take because the lighting was too harsh in one area and it didn't feel safe enough to go into another spot that looked promising. On that occasion, it had been late in the afternoon and by that time there had been only one other photographer with me. As I was setting up the camera, a girl chewing a carrot had come by and asked some questions about what I was doing; she was in her late teens or early twenties. She told me that she had taken a photography class in junior high school, and I let her look at the ground glass. She was hungry and asked if I had anything to eat. All I had was a soda, and I gave it to her. She said that she was living under the bridge and that although she never thought she would be living in such conditions, she realized now that no one can tell what lies ahead. The security that she had enjoyed in her childhood was no longer a certainty. After I had finished, I mentioned thinking about photographing in another location;

the girl warned me about some people there and advised me not to go. We talked a bit more before returning to our own worlds, one seemingly more secure and stable than the other.

Areas like the 4th Street Bridge site were safer before there were so many unemployed and hungry. The increase in the number of people that have been shut out of the economic mainstream and must spend their time in these strange environments is hard to comprehend in this time of plenty for some. How have we managed to reach a point where so many people must live on the streets and where some feel that they have no other options for survival other than robbery or other forms of violence? As I continue to set up my camera, I wonder again if I will get to the 4th Street Bridge today, if the girl will still be there, if it would be appropriate to make a portrait, if it would include her alone or a large portion of the bridge structure, and, what is more important, if the portrait could tell about or allude to some of the problems our society seems unwilling to solve or even recognize?

At the next promising camera location I consider the similarity of the spaces that exist between the arches I observe and the spaces that exist between trees in a certain forest. A variety of other thoughts pass through my mind, some fully realized and others fleeting glimpses of past experience. This flow of related and unrelated thoughts continues until it is time to look at the ground glass again and to concentrate on refining some details that were not fully resolved with the viewing frame. Next, the exposure for a rather difficult lighting situation must be determined. Consideration of the capabilities of the film, various developers, and various types of darkroom manipulation mingle with decisions about the emotional qualities I want the image to convey. After reconsidering, I decide on a two-minute exposure to allow adequate detail in the shadows. There is more light coming from the left, and I will let that side be a little overexposed, as the film won't block up in the highlights. I can darken these areas in the final print. If I expose and develop the film so that it will print without any darkroom manipulation, the local contrast will be insufficient to properly define the textures that I envision in the final print. I try to think of each step in the total process helping to get me closer to the final goal. A relatively small percentage of my negatives become final prints with failures generally due to miscalculations in aesthetic judgments rather than in technique. I begin the exposure and start to think about the next subject as I examine this strange environment and the process continues. My thought process while photographing is not linear or direct as expressed most often in instruction books. Under the bridges, the smells, traffic noise, and visual elements act as catalysts to activate a series of random, nonchronological thoughts that occasionally generate a meaningful image.

Initially I was interested in many bridge sites and the variety they offered. More recently, the Santa Ana Freeway site has attracted me with its changing graffiti, stains emerging from the interaction between water pollutants and concrete, and the unwanted objects that people have discarded. In some ways the bridge structures become reminiscent of cathedrals but none that I have seen before; they are somehow skewed, not friendly but still very intriguing. They also evoke the series of eighteenth-century etchings of prisons by the Italian artist Giambattista Piranesi. I am beginning to realize the number of possibilities I have not discovered within this small area and how other areas must be the same if the time is taken to gain knowledge of them. Much about this area still remains undefined and that is what intrigues me, a never-ending puzzle with new possibilities that draw me back, and I am anxious to return.

PLATE 25 BROADWAY BRIDGE, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1982

PLATE 26 DETAIL OF PALM TREE LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

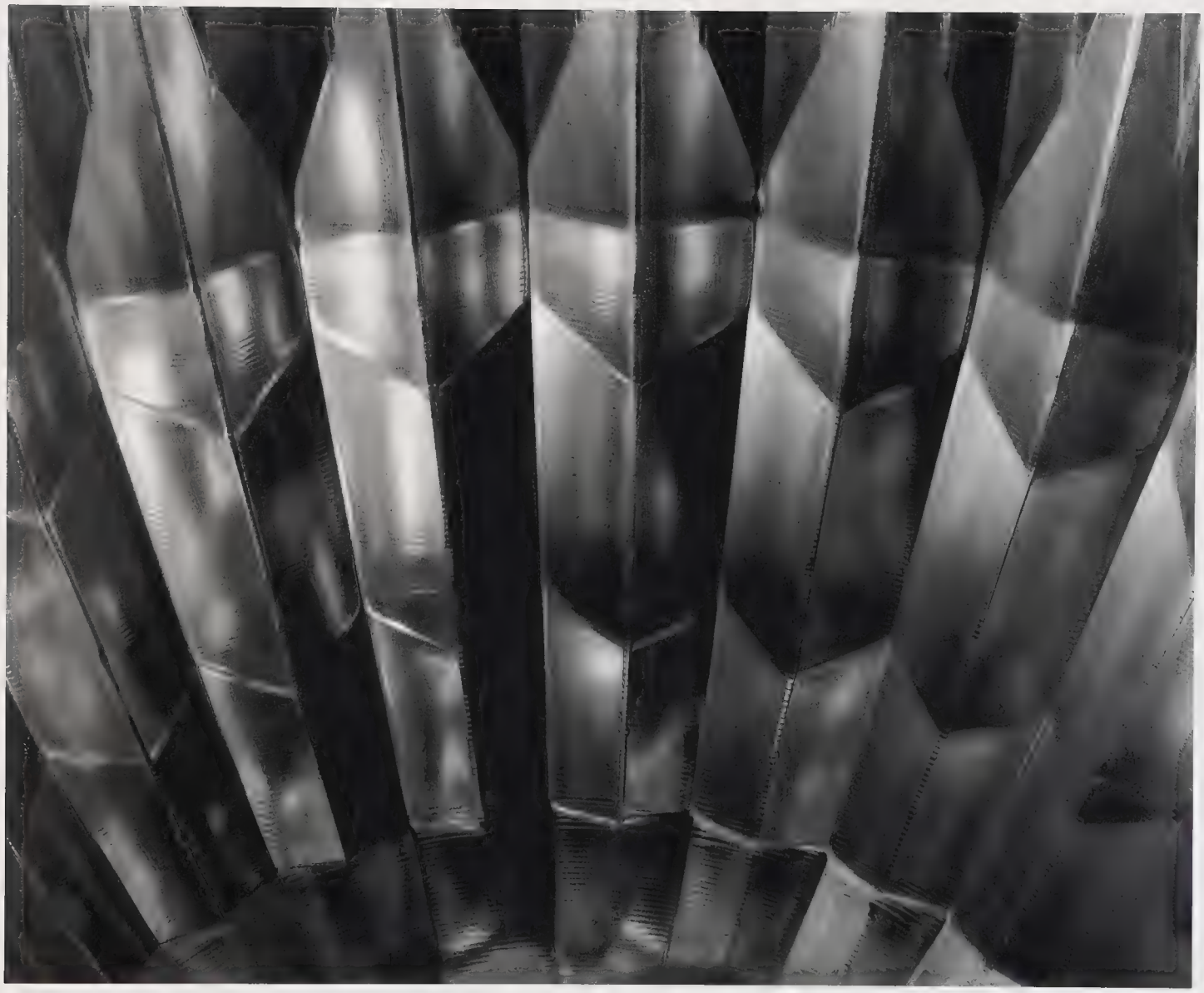


PLATE 27 DETAIL OF METAL DUCT, UNIROYAL TIRE FACTORY, CITY OF COMMERCE, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 28 POND YOSEMITE HIGH COUNTRY CALIFORNIA, 1981

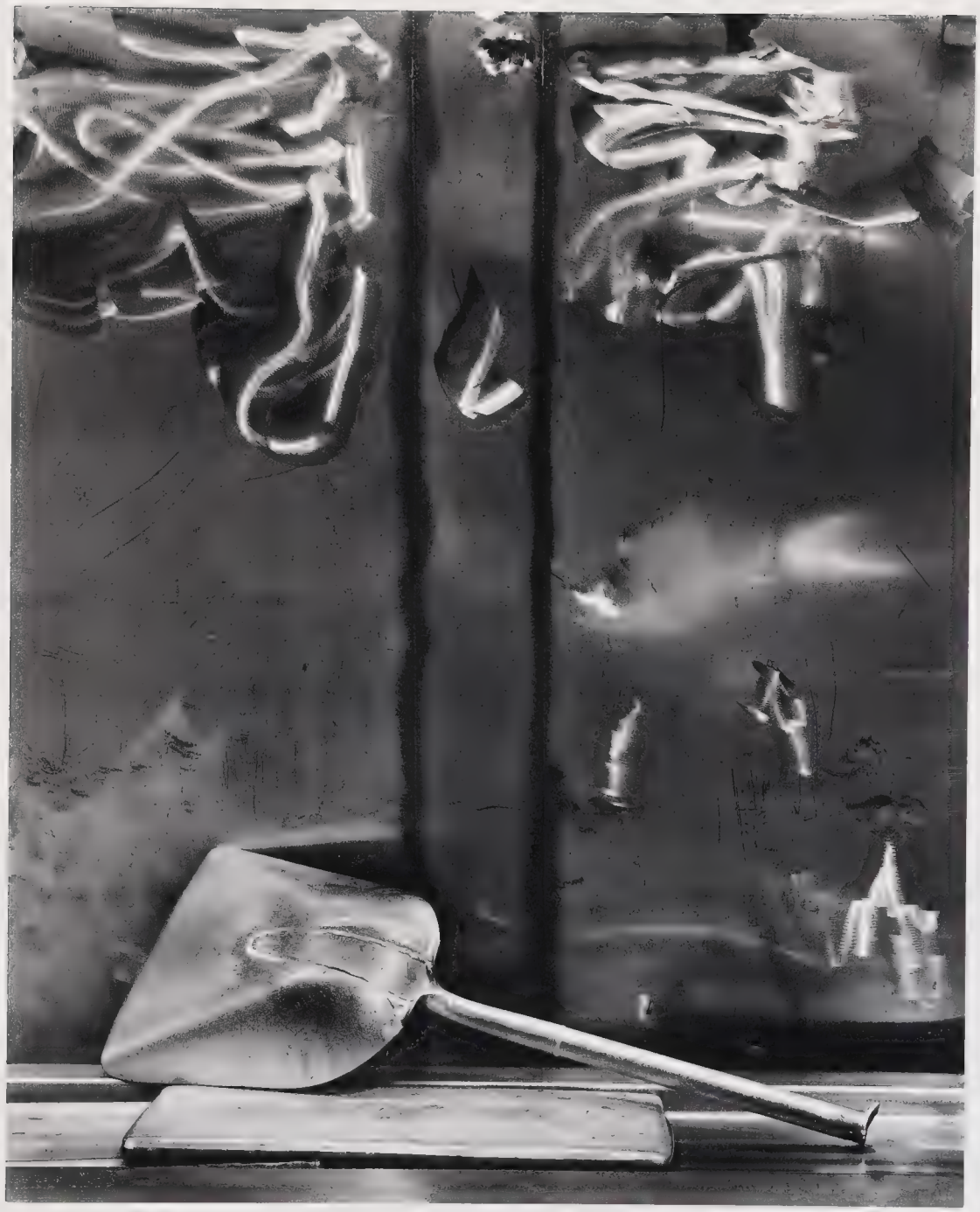


PLATE 29 SHOVEL, POULTRY FACTORY, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 30 FLOATING ROCK, TORREY PINES STATE PARK, CALIFORNIA 1980

IV

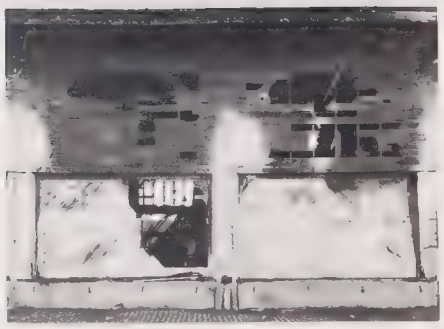
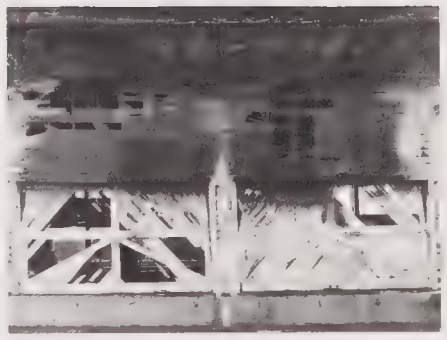
The Separation Between Urban and Natural Areas

The idea of "wilderness" is a fairly recent concept. Wilderness existed a comparatively short time, beginning with Coronado's expedition into the southwestern United States in 1539 and essentially ending with John Wesley Powell's Colorado River Expedition and subsequent explorations of the Colorado Plateau from the late 1860s through the 1880s. The wilderness was composed of lands that were not under the control of civilization. Such lands were thought of unfavorably and were considered areas to be conquered and made safe. Ironically, today this perspective seems more appropriate to our inner cities. The idea of an unspoiled wilderness disappeared as people introduced policies that encouraged questionable development for short-term profits without considering the land's ability to support the proposed uses.

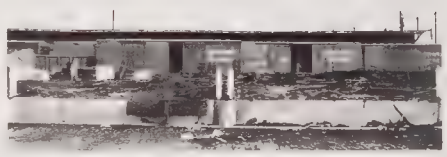
What is presently referred to as a "wilderness experience" usually involves getting to the starting point by car or another form of modern transportation, relying on products of modern manufacture, and having emergency rescue equipment available. I am not opposed to these provisions in certain areas, but they are not necessary all the time. Preservation of existing natural areas that offer some of the comforts of modern civilization should be coupled with the restoration of areas that have been inappropriately developed, allowing them to recapture some of their original wildness. Now that the wilderness has, in fact, been conquered and no longer exists in a healthy state, its value is recognized; the loss is felt and the idea of wilderness is revered.

In the United States, until relatively recent times, people lived in direct contact with the natural landscape, as they continue to do in many other parts of the world. The separation between urban and natural areas has accelerated as an expanding population alters the landscape in dramatic and injurious ways. This division has been reinforced by a multitude of boundaries imposed by national, state, county, city, and other public and private jurisdictions that further cut up the land. These boundaries define what is beautiful and to be enjoyed, as well as what is degraded or unsafe and hence to be avoided; they allow, restrict, or prohibit specific activities. Although boundaries are set to protect property, two conflicting uses are often placed side-by-side with detrimental results. As the number of boundaries increases, fewer chances arise for positive interaction between people and the natural environment, and the chances for negative interaction grow. Presently, development's adverse impact, although intended to be confined within certain limits, reaches every portion of the land, sea, and sky. Acid rain, smog, proliferation of pesticides, radiation, destruction of the ozone layer, and global warming are but a few of the forms of pollution that affect us.

We now have different standards for natural and urban areas. We should, however, be considering policies that imply equal consideration and behavior in regard to each area, rather than adopting philosophies that view them in opposition to each other. The health of the land and of its people should be viewed as equally important goals in the process of seeking solutions to the many complex problems confronting us. A sufficient number of studies have warned us about these problems we are facing; it is clearly time to reconsider our priorities regarding the health and safety of all forms of life in urban, rural, and undeveloped areas.

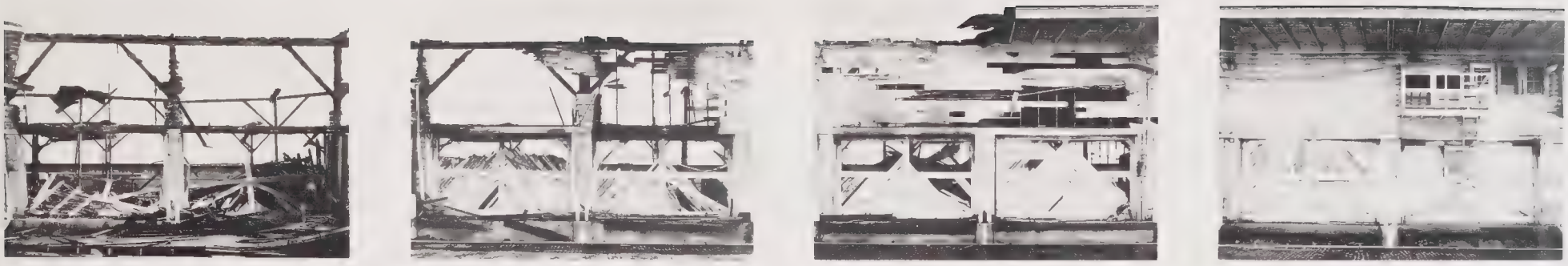
Even when considering aesthetic values as they manifest themselves on a thin piece of emulsion, many people tend to treat the urban and natural landscapes differently. For me the distance between these two subjects lessened around 1980. I was only able to photograph the natural landscape a couple of times a year, and as a result, the closed-down Uniroyal Tire Factory became the place where most of my photography was done. Although I had driven by it for fifteen years, I had not considered it as a photographic subject for an extended project. Ultimately, I became intrigued with the industrial areas behind the half-mile long facade, adjacent to the Santa Ana Freeway, and eventually began to photograph the factory. I went there for two to three days a week until I had exposed approximately eight hundred negatives over a two-year period of time. Most of the interior areas were very dark—due both to a lack of light and a coating of carbon that covered the surfaces—and thus required exposures that averaged about a half hour per negative. During the longer exposures I wandered through the building, becoming more familiar with its qualities as I sought out new photographs. Even at the end of this project I was still seeing intriguing new potential images that arose from the different qualities of light that came into play when the seasons or weather changed. Often I experienced sensations in the factory that I had earlier felt in the Sierra Nevada mountain range or a desert canyon. The spatial relationships, contrasts, and tonalities that I found more accessible and easier to work out in urban areas began to appear in my photography of the natural environment. The line that had existed between the natural and urban landscapes disappeared in my photography, and neither environment could be ignored or placed above the other in importance.



I photograph urban bridge sites and abandoned industrial areas in the same manner as the natural landscape, with a concern for tonalities, textures, luminosity, etc. This is not to say that I fail to immediately recognize the urban area's declining condition. Although the photographs depict a certain abstract beauty, they show stains, graffiti, random changes, traces of fires, and other evidence that the structures depicted have lost their initial value. For me, photographically, these features add

Illustrations 4, 5, 6, and 7 (left to right) Burntout Warehouse Series, Los Angeles, California 1979

Illustrations 7, 8, 9, and 10 (top to bottom) Burntout Warehouse Series, Los Angeles, California 1979-1982



visual interest, imposing a somewhat accidental overlay on otherwise uninteresting buildings and disclosing a complex process of aging. It is hoped that the photographs will be looked at for values beyond their aesthetic qualities and will raise questions. What existed initially and what has been gained or lost? Where did the materials come from that were used for construction and how was the source site affected? What was it like to work in the area? What happened to the people that worked there? What will replace these structures?

With photographs of the natural landscape, the same technical and aesthetic processes are used to manipulate the negative, and we accept the healthiness of the areas photographed without questioning their condition. Have these natural areas already started a decline that a black-and-white photograph fails to reveal—presenting instead images that make us feel comfortable? Do such regions only seem healthy when compared to our urban environment, and is our land more at risk than we realize? My images of the natural landscape attempt to capture an ideal for which we long; they leave out trash and poorly planned and unsightly features that might lurk just outside the coverage of the lens. Shouldn't we be leaving portions of our land unused so that unspoiled areas will exist for future generations who will presumably have a better understanding of how our environment functions?

Illustrations 11, 12, 13, and 14 (left to right) Burntout Warehouse Series, Los Angeles, California 1979

PLATE 31 WHITE ROCK, YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA, 1981

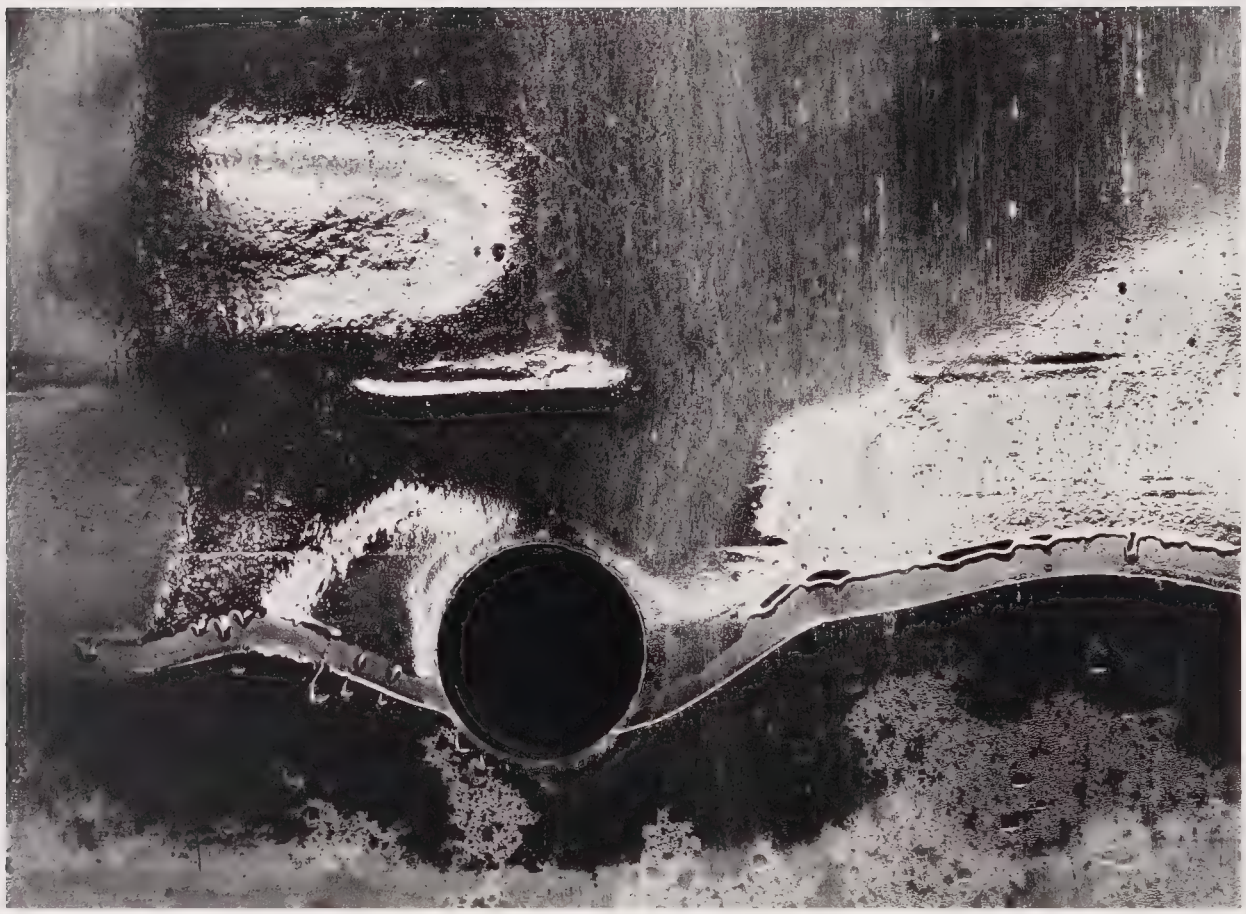


PLATE 32 DETAIL OF WATER ON METAL, POULTRY FACTORY, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 33 DREDGE INTERIOR, ISLETON, CALIFORNIA 1979

PLATE 34 WINDOW DETAIL, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 35 SPRAY BOOTH, FLOURESCENT FIXTURE FACTORY, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 36 FOGGY INTERIOR, UNIROYAL TIRE FACTORY, CITY OF COMMERCE, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 37 SCULPTURAL DETAIL UNIROYAL TIRE FACTORY, CITY OF COMMERCE, CALIFORNIA, 1980

PLATE 38 BUNKER HILL, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1981

PLATE 39 CALIFORNIA PLAZA CONSTRUCTION SITE, BUNKER HILL, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1984
(LOOKING SOUTH FROM BELOW GRAND)

PLATE 40 CALIFORNIA PLAZA CONSTRUCTION SITE, BUNKER HILL, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1984
(LOOKING SOUTH ALONG GRAND)

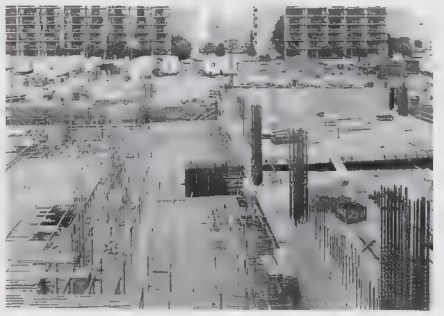
V

Ignoring the Environment We Occupy

I grew interested in photographing the area to the west of downtown Los Angeles known as Bunker Hill in 1979. At one time, this area had been an affluent residential extension of the main commercial district of the city and was characterized by spacious Victorian houses. By the late 1950s, however, most of these residences had been converted to rooming houses, and an urban renewal project was instituted in 1959. Demolition of existing buildings and construction of new structures began in the early 1960s. The development proposals aimed at bringing life back to the central city. Drawings depicted assorted street vendors, children, and an ethnic mix of people enjoying a variety of activities in an exciting landscape. This certainly seemed to be a healthy goal for an urban environment. However, as the ongoing project nears its expected completion date—sometime in the late 1990s—this vision is far from being realized.

The area is presently dominated by high-rise office buildings of an institutional character, and there are few structures or landscaped areas that counteract their rigidity. Only intermittent flurries of activity generate sufficient energy for some spaces to become lively. Most of the time, public areas are empty. It is during these times that the character of the architecture intrudes in an overpowering and intimidating way. When walking through the area, the sense of scale seems entirely wrong. Spaces that were only a few inches long on paper when a building was being planned take several minutes to traverse on the physical site. Although the repetition of identical panels encasing a structure might have seemed to impart an interesting pattern or texture in a drawing, it often becomes monotonous when observed at actual scale.

For me, photographically speaking, there are two times when the Bunker Hill area comes alive and exhibits a greater visual interest. The first occurs during periods of construction when the internal elements of a building are visible. As one walks around a construction site, structural members and light constantly change, creating new patterns and images as the building grows. Ultimately, the structure is covered by a series of identical panels, often making me think of a multitude of cells, each of which functions in set patterns similar to those observed in the controlled environment of a beehive or a prison. Night is the other time that the area becomes visually interesting. Reflection and accidental patterns of light create new forms and illusionary spaces. At night, the monotonous walls of uniform panels begin to break up as lights are left on or turned off in random patterns. You can see



Illustrations 15, 16, 17, and18 (top to bottom) California Plaza Construction Site, Bunker Hill, Los Angeles, California 1981-1983
(Looking East from Grand)

into some of the offices and sense various types of activity; you realize that there might be a greater functional and aesthetic diversity than is suggested during the day.

Accidental conditions, such as those seen during construction or at night, provide an atmosphere that encourages people to participate visually in the environment and explore its potential. It seems strange that the unplanned elements of development are often more appealing than those that are designed by people trained in the visual arts. Unfortunately, the "success" of many such projects is evaluated solely in terms of profits, square footage leased, traffic volumes, etc. Few are evaluated on a qualitative basis where human desires and needs determine the direction that development takes.

Confronted with uninteresting surroundings, we spend much of our time avoiding or ignoring the environment we occupy. We are anxious to get away from where we work and to escape during the weekends. Although most people would not say they ignore places with which they are closely associated, few could describe what occurs along routes to often-used destinations. In the past survival was a matter of knowing one's surroundings. Today we know very little about our habitats, only bits and pieces—where certain groceries are kept at the market and other such scraps of information that we deem important to our own functioning. These scattered pieces of information do not generate the kind of knowledge of the environment that will allow us to make wise decisions on a broader scale. For many, there is no time to be concerned about the use of a certain natural resource or even a neighborhood across town. Our civilization has reached a point where we must consider the implications of all our actions because everything is so interconnected. It is just as important to save and properly plan our cities as it is to protect natural areas. The health of the forests and the health and well-being of families in low income neighborhoods should receive equal importance and attention, rehabilitation and nurturing.

PLATE II PLAZA, BUNKER HILL, LOS ANGELES CALIFORNIA 1983

PLATE 42 PAINTED WALL, BURNT BUILDING, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, 1987

PLATE 43 OAK TREES IN FOG, MYERS GRADE ROAD, CALIFORNIA, 1984

PLATE 44 BRUCE JOHNSON'S SCULPTURE GARDEN, MYERS GRADE ROAD, CALIFORNIA, 1984

PLATE 45 HAPPY ISLES, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1983

PLATE 46 WALKING TREES, EL CAPITAN MEADOW, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1983

PLATE 47 WALKING TREES, EL CAPITAN MEADOW, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1984

VI

Slowly, Knowledge of the Area Reveals

My favorite times in Yosemite National Park are late fall, winter, and early spring with their smaller crowds and more interesting weather and lighting conditions. Most of my trips involve camping and waking up to dark cold mornings. Usually, I emerge slowly from my sleeping bag while surrounding my body with layers of clothing. I try to avoid the moisture or frozen condensation on the ceiling of the van, clear the frozen windshield, and determine the need for chains before looking for my first photograph. The early morning light is beginning to show faintly in the eastern sky as I drive toward my initial destination of El Capitan Meadow. There, some form of magic is most likely to occur. I must anticipate and be prepared for such a magical moment so that I can react quickly enough for a photograph.

Invariably, it seems, only one or two other vehicles are parked next to the meadow. The occupants are probably rock climbing on the face of El Capitan. They may be able to see me, but I can't see them as I begin to wander through the meadow, reacquainting myself with fallen trees, grasses, and other elements. The major rock forms are the same as on previous trips, but details vary with each visit. Sometimes there is a slight haze in the air that might turn into ground fog. The backlit trees may appear to darken and stand out from the granite cliffs as the moisture in the air diffuses the light and separates these features spatially. The play of light on a fallen branch, steadily bleached by the sun since my last trip, might make it become more important to me. The wet cliffs glistening from an early morning rain can become silvery before the sun dries their surface. And, sometimes, a rush of melting snow falls as the air warms, and a white fantasyland is converted into a sharply divided world of black trees and a white groundcover. During the colder portion of the year any of these conditions and numerous others are possible. Magic is always occurring, either on a panoramic scale that cannot be missed or in some intimate detail, which, with keen effort, can only be seen for a few seconds. If I am lucky, I will be able to combine these two aspects of the landscape in one photograph.

This special photographic magic does not always occur at the location I have selected; maybe I'm not attuned to subtleties at that moment or not fast enough to translate an event into an image. However, sometimes just for the sheer enjoyment of experiencing the area more fully, I will begin to photograph. For me, the camera, rather than acting as a barrier, heightens my ability to see; I ignore all distractions and concentrate on the combination of factors that will be most revealing. The process of selecting a viewpoint and operating the camera equipment is important, even though it may only have provided a visual exercise or a sketch for a later photograph. At all times I experience the joy of being in the area and eventually returning to a warm van with a feeling of satisfaction, even when a successful image seems unlikely. Then I sit next to the meadow, relax, have a juice and yogurt, and enjoy the changing light while the valley's beauty unfolds.

Several years ago, during a very severe winter storm, two large branches fell from one of the oak trees in El Capitan Meadow, and the smaller ends became embedded in the ground. These smaller portions of the branches resembled legs and for me these branches became "walking trees." My first images of this sculptural form were taken in 1982. Repeated visits began to reveal information

about their placement in the meadow and make me aware of a changing sense of scale as I moved around them, as well as their metaphoric possibilities. Bits of information about their surroundings—dew clinging to grasses, light glancing off surfaces, mist and snow floating through space and eventually coming to rest—began to form a body of knowledge about the area without ever fully revealing its mysteries. As I walked under the branches, feelings of openness, enclosure, and protection alternated. In later years the smaller twigs fell away from the original fallen branches, and finally, the smaller of the two fell. These natural acts of aging and decay slowly eroded what had once existed. Some of the branches were cut off by other visitors to the meadow, and the sense of serenity and rightness that had been was altered by these destructive acts. In the future these "walking trees" will exist only in the minds of those people who saw them and in the images made by myself and others.

One day I picked up a small piece of one of the branches that was lying on the ground and covered it in my hands in both a gesture of protection and possessiveness. I felt the sharp edges, the softness of areas beginning to decay; examining a few small woodpecker holes, I sensed the intricacies of a new and smaller sculptural form. I thought that it would look nice on a shelf next to one of my prints of the "walking trees". It was only a small piece of wood about three inches long and would not be missed. But a question was beginning to form in my mind. It was not one of defacing a sensitive area or taking nutrients away from the site, as that piece of wood was too small to make much of a difference, and it is unlikely that other people would follow my example. But there was something much more subtle that affected me, a feeling that the piece of wood should exist in that place rather than becoming a decoration in a distantly alien environment.

The time that I have spent in this small portion of El Capitan Meadow has allowed me to become familiar enough with the area that I can visualize many aspects of it when I am not there. In a way I am beginning to take possession of that small area. Not in terms of having a deed that says I own a plot of land but in knowing it and having a strong attachment to it. Anyone can take possession of that bit of land or any other in a similar manner. All that is required is time for the land to become meaningful and time to acquire knowledge about it. Slowly, knowledge of the area reveals how and why diverse elements relate and what is lost when something is altered, destroyed or removed.

Photography intensifies my relationship to the environment and enables me to ask new questions. To what extent should we intrude and impose our own ways, altering, changing, and finally destroying the essence of what originally attracted us? Will our presence create something better, or will something be lost forever if we are not careful? The process of evaluation continues and provides me with new insights for return visits.

PLATE 48 WALKING TREES, EL CAPITAN MEADOW, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA 1985

PLATE 19 WALKING TREES EL CAPITAN MEADOW, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1986

PLATE 50 WALKING TREES, EL CAPITAN MEADOW, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1985

PLATE 51 WALKING TREE, EL CAPITAN MEADOW, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1991

PLATE 52 ASPEN GROVE, NEAR INDEPENDENCE PASS, COLORADO, 1986

PLATE 53 ROCK WITH DOGWOOD, MERCED RIVER, YOSEMITE VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, 1987

PLATE 54 POND BELOW MINING FACILITY, NEAR OURAY, COLORADO, 1989

VII

The Forests are Necessary for a Viable Civilization

As I approach a forest, I sense a certain mystery about what lies ahead and sometimes even experience a somewhat threatened feeling about what I might encounter. However, this feeling changes to one of welcome as I enter and become part of this sheltering, protective environment. At first, the placement of the trees seems to be random and unplanned. But somehow an order becomes recognizable, not the order of houses laid out in city blocks or crops planted in neatly spaced rows, but a much more complex order. A mixture of large and small trees presents a succession of growth with the old nurturing the young and gradually being replaced in an unbroken chain of renewal. There is so much to see—a scar from a past fire, holes where acorns were once hoarded, cobwebs, birds and insects flying from tree to tree. Then there are the shapes and textures of leaves, needles, grasses, and tree trunks in an infinite variety of greens, grays, and browns, with the occasional wildflower heightening the experience. All this is made more complex by the patterns of sun and shade. As breezes come up, photographic problems increase. Maybe I will be able to convey all my thoughts about the forest at some point in the future, but at this time only glimpses and hints are possible. I realize that I have witnessed a unique moment that will never again exist in exactly the same way. We may not notice the changes but they are constantly occurring within what we see and within ourselves.

A conflict exists between my photographs and reality. My images are not meant to record specific sites but rather to show certain aspects of the forest, to reach the viewer on an emotional level, and to act as catalysts. The photographs cannot capture the experience of being in a forest with its smells, sounds, and sensations. However, they can act as reminders of previous experiences, inspire future encounters, and suggest the need to make careful decisions about the environment. As we gain a better understanding of the way things interact, we appreciate the interdependence of all elements and the possible detrimental effects that can occur when conditions are altered beyond a certain point.

A few years ago I thought it might be interesting to see the devastation caused by the eruption of Mount St. Helens. I had been prepared by television, magazines, and the work of other photographers for a disaster of great magnitude. What I had not been prepared for were the clear-cut areas I encountered en route. The devastation of these areas seemed to far surpass anything at the eruption site, which, in contrast, seemed almost serene and possessed of a sense of order. To drive through a healthy forest with all its sensual pleasures and then suddenly confront total destruction was a great shock. I wanted to ask if the products that were made from the destroyed trees would last or if they would be added to our garbage dumps long before these forests were renewed.

We must begin to relate to the forest in a different way, one that considers a balance between what it can offer and what we need to take. At the most immediate and basic level, forests provide fuel and building materials. They also hold back water, thus stopping flooding and the subsequent siltation of rivers and harbors; they prevent loss of topsoil, the undercutting of agricultural land, and loss of

nutrients; they also provide a habitat for many animals. It is nice to have an abundance of building and publishing materials at a reasonable cost, but it is far more important to have the mixture of fresh air that we breathe, which is a by-product of the forest's use of carbon dioxide. This means that portions of the forest should be harvested in a logical manner, and other major tracts of land should remain untouched for our protection.

The forest stands as a symbol of life in ways that deserts and rocky regions cannot. The abundance and diversity of matter provides for a continuance of life on a large scale. The forests have existed over millions of years while civilization has existed for a comparatively short time. If we continue to use our forest areas faster than they can be replaced, then many may never recover. Perhaps I am somewhat selfish in wanting the beautiful views I find in the forest to remain available as one of my favorite photographic subjects. On a more basic, and perhaps more selfish level, I realize the forests are necessary for a viable civilization and that they play an important part in providing the clean air and other conditions that allow me to survive.

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AFTERWORD

Some people say they must speak for Nature. Nature already speaks to us in many ways—in the form of clear air with the right balance of elements to promote life, enriched soils that were built up over centuries, life-giving rain that is necessary for survival, and the wonders of diverse animal and vegetable life. At other times we are spoken to with devastating floods that change the terrain; fires that initially bring death and destruction, only later to herald a renewal of more vigorous forms of life; and earth movements that make mountain ranges and valleys with the eventual shifting of continents. Nature has created a multitude of other large and small tragedies as well as glorious and wondrous events that have enabled the earth to evolve over billions of years, life to exist over millions of years, and civilization to develop over thousands of years. Our ancestors also speak to us with stories from past civilizations that once flourished but no longer exist. The conditions that have until recently enabled humans to prosper are in jeopardy of being thrown out of balance if present uses and abuses of our environment continue. Nature will always exist and be in control, forming the constraints that we must understand in order to continue our human journey. Therefore, it is we who must be open and listen to that which is beautiful or that which seems difficult and harmful so that we might learn and thus survive.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Total Process Becomes a Collaboration

Although much of my photography is a private endeavor, its intent is to communicate with others. In the photographic process there is a lot of sharing of ideas, technical material, and other information. The total process depends on others in an intricate and complex combination of giving and taking. No matter how private photography may seem, the total process becomes a collaboration. The following are some of the people, listed in the approximate chronological order, who played a part, both directly and indirectly, in making this book become a reality. Their interest and concern is greatly appreciated.

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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

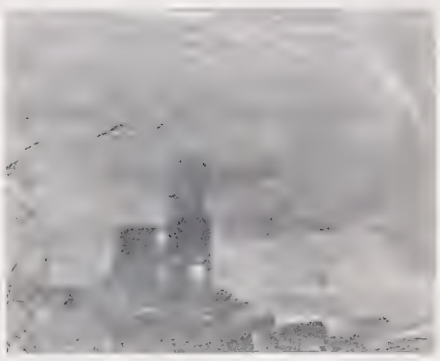
Many Forms of Manipulation are Usually Required

The early images in this book were made with a Maymia Universal camera and a roll film back on Panatomic-X film, developed in a dilute solution of HC-110. In 1979 I started using a 4 x 5 wood field camera, first a Nagaoka, then a Tachihara. Their light weight but somewhat limited cameras movements were a good compromise for most images that I was interested in making. The sheet films that were used for most of the large format images are Tri-X and T-Max. Tripods were used with both the Maymia and field cameras. I find Gitzo tripods to be very strong and they are also very dependable. I use a Pentax Spotmeter for determining exposures. Most of the time I do not use filters, as I feel they often destroy the quality of light that originally attracted me to make a negative.

I am very lax on keeping records and sometimes cannot give exact information on lenses or development times that were used. The focal length of lenses used with the field camera were 90 mm, 135 mm and 210 mm. The 90 mm lens was used close to half of the time, as it allowed me to get close enough to the main object that I could feel more involved with the subject being photographed.

I use longer film development times than most photographers due to the fact that I use very dilute developers. The combination of dilute developers and the way I agitate film during development gives me a compensating effect that allows me to hold more detail in the shadow and highlight areas. My film usually requires normal or varying degrees of minus development (reduced development time) with almost never any plus development (extended development time). This is due to the conditions under which I photograph and the type of negative I like to enlarge. Long exposures, which increase contrast, were required for the photographs taken at night and for other situations where a large amount of contrast initially existed. In addition to using HC-110 and T-Max developers for sheet film, for extremely contrasty situations, I use the Pyrocatechin formula, found in the back of Ansel Adams' book, *The Negative*. Pyrocatechin is a very toxic chemical, can be absorbed through the skin and should be used with great care in a well-ventilated room. All photographic chemicals have the potential to cause adverse effects when used excessively or under improper conditions. Although we may not be bothered by a certain chemical, it is hard to predict the detrimental effects of photographic chemicals in combination with other chemicals and pollutants we come in contact with, knowingly and unknowingly. In order to minimize the environmental impact of my photography, I spend more time thinking about the photograph that I'm making, use fewer chemicals and less paper, resulting in processing fewer final prints and end up with less trash.

Most images require extensive darkroom manipulation to achieve what was initially felt or what was determined to be important at a later time. There are very few straight images in this book. One is Plate 37, Sculptural Detail, Uniroyal Tire Factory, 1981. Only slight edge burning in the lower right hand corner was used to overcome the uneven lighting condition that originally existed. The negative for this image is badly underexposed, as I did not fully understand the effect of reciprocity failure for long exposures and did not give a sufficient exposure time, resulting in a rather thin negative. However, this poorly exposed negative results in one of the easiest prints I have. Another image that requires only slight edge burning is Plate 59, Tenaya Creek, Yosemite Valley, California, 1989. A



Polaroid print was made as the sun was beginning to break through the clouds. Type 54 film was able to hold all the detail in the shadow and highlight areas. I immediately made a T-Max negative and selected a decreased development time that would approximate the qualities found in the Polaroid print. In the past, an exact match to a Polaroid print was impossible for me to obtain and a new interpretation was usually required. However, an enlarged print was easily achieved that matched the Polaroid print without extensive manipulation.

For enlarging, I use an older Omega enlarger with a condenser light source. I use Kodak Elite, Mitsubishi, and Oriental graded papers and Ilford multigrade paper, using different filters to modify local contrast. Many forms of manipulation are usually required. First there is burning and dodging to adjust the amount of light that goes through the negative and exposes the print. Sometimes up to 15 to 20 steps are required to readjust values to what I felt when the negative was initially made. After burning and dodging, other techniques become important to achieve a satisfactory print. Sometimes I will go back to the negative to readjust values in portions or all of the negative. For intensification, I will either use selenium toner on portions of or the entire negative or add density to small areas with the use of spotone. For density reduction on the negative, I have occasionally used potassium fericyanide bleach on the negative. However, I usually don't like to use bleach on the negative because of the possibility of mistakes occuring. I normally make a second negative which is exposed and developed in the same manner as the first negative. The second negative gives me an extra negative to try different methods of manipulation and is also insurance against defects. Sometimes I will use potassium fericyanide bleach to readjust values on portions of the print. These and other methods are used to achieve a satisfactory final print. Occasionally one procedure will be used but more often the final print requires a combination. All prints are finally selenium toned for archival purposes and also in most cases for a slight shift to a more pleasing print color or a more neutral black.

Illustration 19 shows the densities in the original negative. Illustration 20 shows a straight print of the entire negative, made on grade #2 paper. Illustration 21 includes, burning and dodging and is printed on grade #3 paper. Illustration 22 shows the final print, made on grade #3 paper and includes the added techniques of intensification of the negative, and bleaching the print.

Illustration 19, 20, 21 and 22 (top to bottom) Antelope House, Canyon de Chelly, Arizona 1987

COLOPHON

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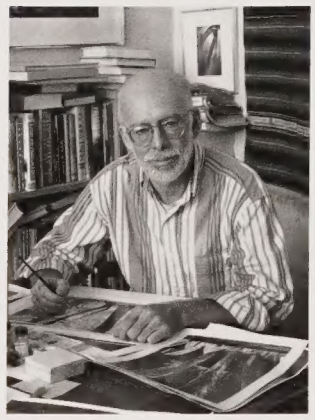

For over twenty years Ray McSavaney has explored various aspects of photography and the environment. He was a co-founder of the Owens Valley Photography Workshops and initiated his own series of workshops in 1991. He has been an instructor in both of these successful programs and numerous others. His photographs have been widely reproduced and are included in public and private collections throughout the world. His work has appeared in *California Scenic, Outdoor Photographer, View Camera, The Journal of Large Format Photography*, and other journals. It has also been published in *West of Eden: A History of the Art and Literature of Yosemite; Developing the Creative Edge in Photography; Using the View Camera; and Photography* (an instructional text).

John Nichols knows intimately the worlds he writes about and photographs. His eight novels include *The Sterile Cuckoo, The Milagro Beanfield War* (the first part of his New Mexico trilogy), *American Blood*, and the recently published *An Elegy for September*. His nonfiction and photography are included in *The Last Beautiful Days of Autumn, A Fragile Beauty: John Nichols' Milagro Country, The Sky's the Limit*, and *Keep It Simple* (forthcoming from Norton).

Photograph of Ray McSavaney by John Stewart
Photograph of John Nichols by Robert Leary

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